

William King Regional Arts Center Receives \$2.7 Million in Federal Funds (June 6, 2006)

STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN RICK BOUCHER

Federal Funding Announcement

William King Regional Arts Center

Abingdon, Virginia

June 6, 2006

I am pleased to return to the William King Regional Arts Center this morning to announce two provisions of federal funding totaling \$2.7 million for the Arts Center's Cultural Campus Expansion. Today's announcement formally launches this major expansion project, which when completed will double the Arts Center's size and significantly enhance its ability to attract tourists and showcase Southwest Virginia's rich cultural and artistic history.

Effective today, the U.S. Department of Agriculture through its Rural Development Agency, at my urging, is providing a low-interest federal loan in the amount of \$2,631,000 to the Center to fund the construction of a new building housing artisan studios on the William King campus and to make improvements to the existing Main Street entrance to the Center.

Additionally, the Rural Development Agency is providing a federal grant in the amount of \$99,900 to equip the new facility with kilns and other pottery-making equipment, a black-smithing forge, looms, and other tools artisans need to practice their craft.

The William King Regional Arts Center is a major reason for the impressive success of tourism industry in Washington County and the region. It was founded in 1979 by local residents and artists, and today it is an accredited member of the American Association of Museums as well as a partner with the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

Each year, the Arts Center offers classes and programs to students and adults across the region as well as maintaining world class gallery exhibits. The Center is now working to document the cultural and artistic legacy of Southwest Virginia and Northeast Tennessee from 1780-1940 through its Cultural Heritage Project. This dramatic progress during the relatively short existence of the Center clearly justifies the federal awards being made today.

Today we announce funding for the construction of the first phase of the \$6.7 million expansion of the William King

Regional Arts Center. The cost of the first phase of the expansion is \$3.5 million. In addition to the \$2.7 million, which I am announcing today, the Virginia Tobacco Commission is providing a grant in the amount of \$500,000, and the Arts Center has secured nearly \$30,000 in private donations. The Center is continuing to raise private funds for the project and has applied for a \$310,000 federal grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission to cover the remaining cost and reduce the amount of the Rural Development loan. These funds are awaiting final federal approval, and I am strongly encouraging the funding agency to approve this application.

In the first phase of this project, a new Artisans Courtyard facility will be constructed on the campus, near the current Main Street entrance to the Arts Center. The new building will include studio spaces for practicing artisans, who will rent the space at a low cost and produce items for the public to purchase. The studios will be equipped to house several crafts including printmaking and painting, black-smithing, pottery making, and weaving.

In addition to the studios, the new facility includes a common area and classroom space. Parking spaces will be added near the new Artisans Courtyard, and the entrance to the Arts Center will be improved to provide better access to the Courtyard and the Arts Center as well as improved visibility from Main Street.

The second phase of the project will add an addition to the current William King Regional Arts Center building, which will include a new lobby, an improved gift shop, a café, and expanded parking and accessibility for buses and other vehicles accessing the Center. The second phase is expected to cost \$3.2 million, and once the total cost of the first phase is secured, the Arts Center will begin to plan for the second phase.

The William King Regional Arts Center museum building as it stands today is 22,000 square feet in size. The new Artisans Courtyard facility along with the expansion of the current William King building will add over 24,000 square feet of gallery, retail, and studio space to the Arts Center campus, doubling its size.

The new additions to the William King Regional Arts Center will confirm Abingdon as a destination for visitors seeking the cultural and artistic heritage of this region. Currently, artisans practice craft-making in Abingdon's Arts Depot, and Governor Warner announced last year the upcoming construction of the Southwest Virginia Artisans Center near the Virginia Highlands Community College, which will provide retail space for artisans to display and sell their work to a large number of visitors.

With today's announcement, William King Regional Arts Center will be able to contribute to this creative economy by providing low cost studio space for working artisans, many of whom will produce handmade items to be featured not only in the William King gift shop but also the Southwest Virginia Artisans Center. Visitors will be able to observe working artisans and learn about their craft at William King's new Artisans Courtyard, visit the artisans in the Arts Depot, and purchase handmade items from across the region at the Southwest Virginia Artisans Center. Additionally, these visitors will support our local restaurants, shops and inns.

I would like to take the opportunity of these remarks to thank a number of individuals who have been instrumental in today's success.

The Arts Center's Director, Betsy White, has played an essential role in the growth of the Center from its inception to the present, and I would like to extend my congratulations to her. I also want to recognize Dan Caldwell, Chair of the William King Regional Arts Center Board, who also was a driving force behind the creation of the Center and has worked to sustain its growth and success.

I would like to thank Sally Hamer, Area Director of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development Agency, for her support for the award of this funding.

I would also like to thank Bill Shelton, Director of the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, and the Department's excellent staff for their support of this project and assistance with the Appalachian Regional Commission application. I also want to commend the members of the Virginia Tobacco Commission for their support of this project.

Lois Humphreys, Mayor of Abingdon, and the Abingdon Town Council as well as Kenneth Reynolds, Chair of the Washington County Board of Supervisors, and the other members of the Board deserve our recognition today for their support of the William King Regional Arts Center's initiatives over the years.

These federal funds will enhance the William King Regional Arts Center's ability to provide excellence in art education and cultural opportunities for the residents of Southwest Virginia, with attendant benefits for Southwest Virginia's tourism economy. I want to thank each individual who has contributed to the planning of the Cultural Campus Expansion project.